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Low Marks on U.S. Intelligence

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The report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, key parts of which were published yesterday in the Village Voice, raises two basic questions: How much do U.S. intelligence efforts cost? And are they worth it? The panel's answers: The efforts cost more than \$10 billion a year, and no, they aren't worth it.

It took the committee nearly six months to arrive at those answers, but as the waspish exchanges between committee chairman Otis Pike (D-Riverhead) and administration officials during hearings indicated, the executive branch was not overly co-operative in aiding the committee's investigation. Reading the report suggests why: It outlines in detail how the U.S. intelligence community spends most of the money it gets—concluding that “the American taxpayer clearly does not receive full value for his intelligence dollar”—and how, in the past few years, U.S. intelligence has failed in its basic function: gathering information.

On that last score, the report analyzes a number of failures of U.S. intelligence, primarily involving the Central Intelligence Agency, during the past 10 years. Those include:

- The Mideast, where U.S. intelligence not only failed to anticipate the Arab attack in October, 1973, but later in the war lost track of what was happening. When Israel violated the stand-still cease-fire and the Soviets threatened war, the United States, believing Russian concern to be unwarranted, called a world-wide military alert. But the sole source of the U.S. conviction that the Israelis were not violating the cease-fire were battlefield communiques, later proved false, put out by the Israelis. “Poor intelligence had brought America to the brink of war,” the report says.

- Czechoslovakia, where the United States learned of the Soviet invasion in 1968 when the Soviet ambassador in Washington walked into the White House and told President Lyndon Johnson. The CIA did not

know of Soviet troop movements into Czechoslovakia because it had lost track of an entire 100,000-man Soviet army in Poland.

- Vietnam, where the United States was shocked by the Communist Tet offensive in 1968 because U.S. intelligence agencies had been unable to agree on how many troops were in the Communist army. Finally, the agencies settled on a “compromise figure” that was 200,000 too low. Additionally, the CIA, under White House pressure, produced an optimistic report a year earlier on the progress of the pacification program in Vietnam. In fact, the program was a disaster.

- India, where a week before the first nuclear test explosion, an analysis by the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency of India's nuclear capabilities concluded: “A nuclear weapons program will not likely be pursued in the near term.”

The material published yesterday represents about one-third of the 338-page committee report. The entire report is now in the custody of House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.), while a House-White House stalemate continues.

The stalemate came about on Jan. 29, after the House, responding to pleas by President Ford, agreed to withhold publication of the entire Pike committee report until it had been reviewed first by the White House for possible deletion of “highly sensitive matters that might jeopardize national security.” The committee had finished the report Jan. 19. However, Albert and other congressional leaders have feared that the White House would “sanitize” the report to the point where it would be meaningless, so they have delayed giving it to the White House.

The report is concerned with the nation's major intelligence agencies—CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the FBI's intelligence apparatus, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and the National Security Agency. All get sharp criticism for various illegal activities, especially the FBI's harassment program against domestic radicals.

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